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From: Rodriguez, Elias
Sent: Tue 4/7/2015 1:09:10 PM
Subject: Sirenusa (US Virgin Islands) Response

Poisoned in Paradise: A Look at the Pesticide Methyl Bromide

ABC Good Morning America

Apr 6, 2015, 1:17 PM ET

By EMILY SHAPIRO

Members of a Delaware family of four remain seriously ill after possibly being exposed to a pesticide, methyl bromide, on their vacation in the U.S. Virgin Islands in March.

The pesticide allegedly was sprayed in an apartment below them to fix a bug problem the same day the family arrived at their vacation rental condominium unit at the Sirenusa resort on St. John, according to Judith Enck, administrator for the Environmental Protection Agency's Region 2 Office, which covers the U.S. Virgin Islands.

By that night, Enck said, the entire family "started having adverse health effects." Both boys had seizures, according to Enck.

Paramedics responded and took the family to a hospital on neighboring island St. Thomas. Three of the family members were put on ventilators, Enck said. The family was then airlifted to hospitals in the U.S.

What is methyl bromide?

Methyl bromide is a potent neurotoxin that affects the nervous system.

The EPA banned methyl bromide for indoor residential use in the 1980s, Enck said, but the product still is on the market for agricultural use. It's commonly used in California on strawberries, Enck said.

"Decades ago, we established rules saying that pesticide applicators cannot use this toxic pesticide indoors because we were afraid of an outcome just like this one," Enck said.

Enck said it's important to educate the public about alternatives to very toxic pesticides.

"There's something called integrated pest management where you can look at lesser toxic or

non-toxic ways to deal with bug problems," she said.

Why is methyl bromide dangerous?

According to the EPA, methyl bromide exposure can cause short-term and long-term problems including severe lung injuries and neurological impairment.

"Exposure to methyl bromide is quite serious," Enck said, "And it can really damage your nervous system."

Exposure can cause brain damage and comas, Enck added.

"There are a number of serious health impacts that anyone applying this would know about once they looked at the label on the product and then looked at the supporting documentation that talked about health impacts," she said.

The EPA issued a pesticide warning in the Caribbean and is examining if methyl bromide was used in other locations in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

"Some vacationers or residents may not have had the very serious health response that this family has had, but it can cause headache, nausea, dizziness; it can affect whether your body shakes or not," Enck said.

How is the EPA investigating?

Following the family's hospitalizations, the EPA launched a "comprehensive investigation," Enck said. Officials were sent to sample and monitor the resort's apartments to see if any of the pesticide was left.

"We're looking at what happened here, which we consider an illegal application of methyl bromide," Enck said.

Sea Glass Vacations, which acts as a rental agent for several rental units at Sirenusa, said in a statement that it is "aware that authorities are actively investigating the possibility that the illnesses were due to chemicals used for pest control. The unit immediately below Villa Capri was recently treated for pests by Terminix, however, Villa Capri itself had not been so treated. ... Sea Glass Vacations does not treat the units it manages for pests but instead relies on licensed professionals for pest control services. We are committed to full cooperation with all the authorities currently investigating this matter."

The Department of Justice is investigating Terminix, the company that applied the pesticide, Enck confirmed.

Terminix has halted all fumigation in the Virgin Islands as part of the ongoing investigation, said Peter Tosches, Terminix's senior vice president of corporate communications.

"First and foremost, the family is in our thoughts and prayers," Terminix said in a statement. "We're cooperating with authorities in their investigation, and we're conducting our own thorough investigation in the matter. We're committed to performing all work we undertake in a way that is safe for our employees, customers and the public."

"I've worked on environmental protection issues for close to 30 years, and I've never seen anything like this," Enck said. "My heart goes out to the family that is suffering over two weeks ago with this exposure. But my head goes to the law and the science and the need for strong, environmental regulation and enforcement of the regulation to make sure this never happens again."

ABC video link: <http://www.wjla.com/articles/2015/04/delaware-family-seriously-ill-after-possible-pesticide-poisoning-at-caribbean-resort-112953.html>

Methyl Bromide Pesticide in Paradise Poisoning Case Still Used in U.S. Crops □

NBC News TODAY Show

By Bill Briggs

The pesticide that sickened a Delaware family in the Virgin Islands is banned for indoor fumigation but U.S. growers will still legally use more than 375 metric tons of the chemical on fields this year through special waivers, federal regulators said.

Methyl bromide is blamed in the accidental poisonings of a mom, dad and their two teen sons at a Caribbean resort. The boys remained critically ill Monday at a Philadelphia hospital. Criminal investigators are examining how and why the bug killer got sprayed in a room beneath the family's rented villa two days before they arrived in mid-March.

U.S. law forbids exterminators from using methyl bromide but the Environmental Protection Agency grants a "critical use exemption" to certain farmers — primarily strawberry growers — letting them inject the chemical directly into their soil, the EPA said.

And some organic advocates are worried about the pesticide perhaps reaching grocery-store fruit.

"You have nurseries producing strawberry transplants — the nurseries are the main users of methyl bromide in the U.S. today. The plants in the fields are all started in nurseries. That ground at the nursery is all fumigated," said Jonathan Winslow, field services manager at Farm Fuel, Inc., a farmer-started, organic distribution and research company on the central California coast.

"The agency (EPA) is still working to determine how much methyl bromide to allow for critical uses in 2016 and 2017"

"So that strawberry transplant can get pulled out of the ground at the nursery and moved to an organic field and be produced under an 'organic' certification," Winslow said. "The use of methyl bromide has diminished, yes. But I am concerned about it. That's why I work for an organic company."

The pesticide is so nasty that, in 1987, the United States and 26 other nations signed a treaty called the Montreal Protocol, vowing to phase out methyl bromide mainly because it depletes

the ozone layer. Today, nearly 200 countries have signed that agreement.

But the use of the neurotoxin goes on in farming.

"In the United States, strawberries and tomatoes are the crops which use the most methyl bromide," the EPA says on its website. "Other crops which use this pesticide as a soil fumigant include peppers, grapes, and nut and vine crops."

The EPA offers a "critical use exemption" for methyl bromide to users "who have no technically and economically feasible alternatives and where the lack of methyl bromide will result in a significant market disruption," the EPA said in a statement emailed to NBC News.

"There is no specified end date for the critical use exemption, but the amount of methyl bromide allowed for critical uses has declined from 7,659 metric tons in 2005 to 376 metric tons in 2015. The agency is still working to determine how much methyl bromide to allow for critical uses in 2016 and 2017," the EPA said.

In California, where most U.S. strawberries are grown, farmers have relied for decades on methyl bromide to control diseases and pests.

According to the California Department of Pesticide Regulation, growers in that state used 3.8 million pounds of methyl bromide on 30,000 treated acres in 2012 (the most recent year for which figures are available.) By comparison, California growers used 6.5 million pounds on 53,000 treated acres in 2002.

"Exposure to this chemical will affect not only the target pests it is used against, but non-target organisms as well"

"The use of methyl bromide in California agriculture has dropped significantly over the years as the fumigant is being phased out," said Charlotte Fadipe, spokeswoman for the California Department of Pesticide Regulation.

There appears to be a disconnect, however, between California and federal officials as to when the pesticide may be banned outright.

In California, regulators expect the EPA's critical use exemptions to "go away" in 2017, Fadipe said.

Growers who now get that federal waiver use tractors to drag machines across their plots. Those machines inject the pesticide 12 to 24 inches below the surface of the soil, the EPA said.

That fumigation is done before a crop is planted and it "will effectively sterilize the soil, killing the vast majority of soil organisms," the EPA adds.

Immediately after the pesticide is injected, a field is temporarily covered with a plastic tarp, trapping the chemical in the ground.

"Exposure to this chemical will affect not only the target pests it is used against, but non-target organisms as well," the EPA says on its website. "Because methyl bromide dissipates so rapidly to the atmosphere, it is most dangerous at the actual fumigation site itself."

The people who handle the odorless pesticide are usually considered most at risk.

Human exposure to high concentrations of methyl bromide can cause the central nervous system and the respiratory system to fail, the EPA says. Symptoms of poisoning can include slurred speech, blurred vision, and temporary blindness. More severe symptoms may include bleeding in the brain, heart, and spleen.

In grocery-store fruit, the amounts of potential exposures that concern some organic advocates are far, far smaller and would not lead to such symptoms.

But those advocates still hope to see a full ban enforced in two years.

"Methyl bromide is still being used in a very small scale in agriculture in the ground, and it's done under these critical use exemptions. Originally, that was supposed to have ceased by January 2015," said organic advocate Winslow.

"They're talking about maybe having these critical use exemptions available at an even more diminished amount next year — to finally cease in California in 2017," Winslow added. "We'll see if that actually happens."

NBC video link: <http://www.nbcnews.com/health/health-news/pesticide-vacation-n336576>

CNN

Virgin Islands resort illness: Family slowly recovering

By Dana Ford, CNN

Updated 10:06 PM ET, Mon April 6, 2015

What can you do to prevent pesticide poisoning?

Story highlights

- Sea Glass Vacations terminates its contract with Terminix
- A Delaware family becomes ill at a resort in the U.S. Virgin Islands
- Preliminary EPA results find methyl bromide was present in the unit where they stayed
- The mother is doing well; the father is in stable condition and improving

(CNN) A Delaware father is in stable condition and improving as his two boys remain in critical condition after they became sick -- perhaps from pesticide exposure, federal officials say -- during a trip to the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Steve Esmond, his teenage sons and the teens' mother fell ill more than two weeks ago in St. John, where they were renting a villa at the Sirenusa resort.

The family has confidence in their medical professionals and is hopeful for a full recovery, according to a statement released Monday from the family's attorney, James Maron.

The teens' mother, Theresa Devine, was treated at a hospital and released, and is in occupational therapy, Maron said.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency said Friday that the presence of a pesticide at the rented villa in St. John may have caused the illnesses, which were reported to the EPA on March 20.

Paramedics were called to the villa, which the family was renting.

Esmond was found unconscious; the boys and their mother were having seizures, Maron said. The lawyer did not say who called the paramedics.

Elias Rodriguez, an EPA spokesman, said the agency's preliminary test results "do show that there was a presence of methyl bromide in the unit where the family was staying."

Exposure to methyl bromide can result in serious health effects, including central nervous system and respiratory system damage, according to the EPA.

The use of the pesticide is restricted in the United States because of its acute toxicity. It's not allowed to be used indoors. Only certified professionals are permitted to use it in certain agricultural settings.

The EPA said it is working with local government agencies to investigate whether the family was made ill after a fumigation at the resort on March 18 and whether any environmental regulations or laws were violated.

EPA Regional Administrator Judith Enck said the paramedics were called very early on March 20.

Sea Glass Vacations, which acts as a rental agent for several units at Sirenusa, said the unit directly below the one where the family stayed was recently treated for pests, but their unit was not treated.

The company said it licensed an outside company, Terminix, for the pest control services.

Monday, it ended its contract with Terminix.

In an email to CNN before the termination, a spokesman for Terminix wrote that the company is "committed to performing all work ... in a manner that is safe for our customers, employees, the public and the environment" and is "looking into this matter internally, and cooperating with authorities."

The U.S. Department of Justice has initiated a criminal investigation.

"Many questions remain why an odorless pesticide of this level of toxicity could be manufactured, distributed and applied in a residential area resulting in this family's injuries," Maron said.

The attorney added: "The family is confident that the responsible parties will be brought to justice and held accountable."

CNN's Rob Frehse, Jean Casarez, Sara Ganim, Jason Hanna and Laura Ly contributed to this report.

CNN video link: <http://www.cnn.com/2015/04/06/us/virgin-islands-resort-pesticide/>

Pesticide probed in resort illness of Delaware family, EPA: Pesticide suspected in family's illness

By Laura Ly

Updated 12:24 PM ET, Sat April 4, 2015

CNN

Story highlights:

Delaware family becomes ill at the Sirenusa resort in the U.S. Virgin Islands

Preliminary EPA results find methyl bromide was present in unit where family stayed

U.S. Justice Department has initiated a criminal investigation into the matter

(CNN)—The presence of a harmful pesticide at a luxury villa in the U.S. Virgin Islands may have resulted in the illness of a Delaware family, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency said Friday.

Paramedics were called last week to a rented villa at the Sirenusa resort in St. John after the family of four fell ill. They had rented the villa from March 14 to March 22, and were later hospitalized. The illness was reported to the EPA on March 20.

"Our preliminary results do show that there was a presence of methyl bromide in the unit where the family was staying," said Elias Rodriguez, an EPA spokesman.

Exposure to methyl bromide can result in serious health effects, including central nervous system and respiratory system damage, according to the EPA.

The use of the pesticide is restricted in the United States because of its acute toxicity. It's not allowed to be used indoors. Only certified professionals are permitted to use it in certain agricultural settings.

"It's an ongoing investigation; we're still on the island doing our assessment," Rodriguez said. "We have been doing different types of air sampling and wipe sampling."

Final test results were expected next week.

The EPA is working with local government agencies to investigate whether the family was made ill after a fumigation at the resort on March 18 and whether any environmental regulations or laws were violated.

"Pesticides can be very toxic, and it is critically important that they be applied properly and used only as approved by EPA," said Judith A. Enck, a regional administrator for the EPA. "The EPA is actively working to determine how this happened and will make sure steps are taken to prevent this from happening to others at these vacation apartments or elsewhere."

Depending on the season, the luxury villa where the family stayed rents between \$550 and \$1,200 per night.

Sea Glass Vacations, which acts as a rental agent for several units at Sirenusa, said that the unit directly below the one where the family stayed was recently treated for pests, but that their unit was not treated.

The company said it licensed an outside company, Terminix, for the pest control services.

"Sea Glass Vacations does not treat the units it manages for pests but instead relies on licensed professionals for pest control services," the company said in a statement.

The U.S. Department of Justice has initiated a criminal investigation into the matter, according to a U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission filing made Monday by ServiceMaster Global Holdings, the parent company of Terminix.

In an email to CNN, a spokesman for Terminix wrote that the company is "committed to performing all work ... in a manner that is safe for our customers, employees, the public and the environment" and is "looking into this matter internally, and cooperating with authorities."

"We're thinking about the family, and we join the community in wishing them a speedy recovery," Terminix wrote.

James Maron, an attorney who has been a spokesman for the family, has not responded to requests for comment. The SEC filing described the injuries to the family members as "serious

CNN Video coverage: <http://www.cnn.com/2015/04/03/us/virgin-islands-resort-pesticide/>

Banned pesticide sickens Delaware family at U.S. Virgin Islands resort

Published April 05, 2015

FoxNews.com

A Delaware family of four was seriously sickened after they were accidentally poisoned by exterminators using a banned pesticide at a luxury resort in the U.S. Virgin Islands, a newspaper reported Saturday.

The Wilmington News Journal said the two boys are still in a coma two weeks after being stricken. The newspaper said their father has regained consciousness, while their mother was released from the hospital.

Doctors airlifted Steven Esmond, 49, his wife and their two sons, Sean, 16, and Ryan, 14, to the U.S. after they became ill March 20 during a stay at the \$800-a-night Sirenusa resort on the Caribbean island of St. John.

Theresa Devine is a dentist; Steven Esmond is an administrator at Tatnall School in Grenville, Del.

The Esmonds "are great fighters and we continue to be vigilant and optimistic" they will recover, family attorney James Maron told the newspaper.

The family became sick after a villa below theirs was fumigated two days earlier with methyl bromide, pesticide restricted to outdoor use by the EPA.

The culprit may be the pest control company Terminix that had been called to the resort to deal with a bug problem. The company has a local office on St. John.

The EPA issued a pesticide use warning advisory after the incident and Terminix is now under investigation by the Justice Department for the alleged misuse of the pesticide.

A Terminix official told the News Journal they are cooperating with investigators and wishing the Esmond family a speedy recovery.

Video coverage: <http://www.foxnews.com/us/2015/04/05/banned-pesticide-at-resort-sickens-delaware-family-four-in-us-virgin-islands/>

Family Poisoned at Resort: Some in Critical Condition

ABC Local News

Jessica Rae

04/06/2015 07:17 AM

In March, school administrator Steve Esmond, his wife Dr. Theresa Devine and their two teenage sons may have been exposed to the pesticide methyl bromide at the Sirenusa Resort on St. John in the U.S. Virgin Islands, according to a report on ABC station WPVI-TV

The day the family arrived at their second floor condo, the apartment below them was sprayed with methyl bromide to "deal with an indoor bug," according to Judith Enck, Administrator for the Environmental Protection Agency's Region 2 Office, which covers the U.S. Virgin Islands.

The pesticide was applied during the day of March 19, Enck said, and by that night, the entire family "started having adverse health effects." Both boys had seizures, according to Enck.

Paramedics responded and took the family to a hospital on neighboring island St. Thomas. The boys were then airlifted to a hospital in Philadelphia, Enck said, while the parents were airlifted to a hospital in Delaware.

According to the EPA, methyl bromide exposure can have short-term and long-term effects include severe lung injuries and neurological impairment.

The EPA banned methyl bromide for indoor residential use in 1984, Enck told ABC News today, but the product is still on the market for agricultural use.

Steve Esmond and his sons remain in very critical condition, Enck said today, adding that Devine is not in critical condition.

Steve Esmond is the head of the middle school at the Tatnall School in Wilmington, Delaware, according to the school's website. Theresa Devine is a dentist in Broomall, Pennsylvania, according to the company website.

"They're just one of those families that everyone loves to be around," Oliver Campbell, a peer of one of the boys, told WPVI-TV. "It's just horrible."

"It's terrifying," another peer, Carl Marvin, said to WPVI-TV. "It's really scary to think that this could happen to somebody that you know."

The EPA has launched a "comprehensive investigation," Enck said. Officials were sent to sample and monitor the apartments to see if any of the pesticide was left.

"We're looking at what happened here, which we consider an illegal application of methyl bromide," Enck said.

The EPA also issued a pesticide warning in the Caribbean and is examining if methyl bromide was used in other locations in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

The Department of Justice is investigating Terminix, the company that applied the pesticide, Enck confirmed.

Terminix has halted all fumigation in the Virgin Islands as part of the ongoing investigation, said Peter Tosches, Terminix's Senior Vice President of Corporate Communications.

"First and foremost, the family is in our thoughts and prayers," Terminix said in a statement. "We're cooperating with authorities in their investigation, and we're conducting our own thorough investigation in the matter. We're committed to performing all work we undertake in a way that is safe for our employees, customers and the public."

Sea Glass Vacations, which acts as a rental agent for several rental units at Sirenusa, said in a statement, "Our deepest sympathies go out to the family and all of those impacted by this accident. Our thoughts and prayers hope for a full and speedy recovery."

"We are also aware that authorities are actively investigating the possibility that the illnesses were due to chemicals used for pest control. The unit immediately below Villa Capri was recently treated for pests by Terminix, however, Villa Capri itself had not been so treated," the statement from Sea Glass Vacations added. "Sea Glass Vacations does not treat the units it manages for pests but instead relies on licensed professionals for pest control services. We are committed to full cooperation with all the authorities currently investigating this matter."

Nightmare for family that vacationed at luxury resort

CBS News This Morning

Last Updated Apr 6, 2015 8:01 PM EDT

A dream vacation for one family quickly turned into a nightmare after the couple and their teenage sons fell seriously ill during their stay at Sirenusa, a luxury villa in the U.S. Virgin Islands, reports CBS News correspondent Jericka Duncan.

The Justice Department is looking to determine if the hazardous chemical methyl bromide was being used in a condo dangerously close to where the family was staying.

"This is a highly toxic gas that really shouldn't be used in residential areas, and the consequences could be quite severe," Dr. Patricia Salber said.

According to reports, the teenage boys, ages 16 and 14 have suffered seizures and are in critical condition at a Philadelphia hospital after suffering seizures. Their father is conscious, but cannot move, and their mother has been released.

Methyl bromide is used in farming and insect control in the U.S. and is a highly restricted substance, but is not illegal.

According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, high exposure to humans can cause central nervous system and respiratory failure.

"This chemical is being phased out in the U.S and it's banned actually in some countries in the world. I think that we need to think seriously about why we would use a substance as toxic as this for residential pest when there are alternatives available," Salber said.

In a statement, Terminix, the outside contractor hired to carry out pest control at the resort, said: "We're committed to performing all work we undertake in a way that is safe for our employees, customers and the public."

"It's really hard for anyone to predict right now the kind of recovery either the father or the sons will have and we can only hope for the best," Salber said.

The criminal investigation into Terminix's use of methyl bromide is still ongoing.

Sea Glass Vacations, the rental company which handles the several units at Sirenusa, said in a statement Monday that the unit below the one where the Esmonds stayed had been recently treated for pests by Terminix, but not the one rented by the family.

The company later said it had "terminated its vendor contract with Terminix."

Reuters

Poisoning at Caribbean resort under U.S. investigation

APRIL 6 | BY DAVID ADAMS

(Reuters) - Federal authorities are investigating a possible pesticide poisoning that left two Delaware boys in comas after a family vacation to the U.S. Virgin Islands last month, U.S. officials confirmed on Monday.

The boys and their parents, Stephen Esmond and Theresa Devine had to be airlifted to hospital after falling ill during a stay at the luxury Sirenusa resort in Cruz Bay, St. John, according to the family's lawyer, James Maron.

Two weeks after the incident the boys, both minors, remain in critical condition due to "this unthinkable tragedy," Maron said in a statement. Their mother has been released from hospital and Esmond "is improving and stable," he said.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency said on Monday that preliminary results confirmed the presence at their rented unit of methyl bromide, a dangerous pesticide that may have caused the illnesses.

"EPA took action and the agency has conducted sampling at the site," the agency said in a statement.

The use of methyl bromide in the United States is restricted due to its acute toxicity and exposure can cause respiratory problems and damage to the central nervous system, the EPA said. "Only certified applicators are allowed to use it in certain agricultural settings and it is not authorized for use in indoor dwellings," it added.

The rental unit was directly above another unit which had been fumigated by Terminix, owned by Memphis-based ServiceMaster Global Holdings Inc, a company spokesman confirmed.

In a statement Terminix said the company was praying for the family while also "cooperating with authorities in their investigation, and we're conducting our own thorough internal investigation."

According to its website Terminix is the leading provider of termite and pest control services in the United States.

The EPA said it is working with the Virgin Islands government and the U.S. Department of Justice to investigate whether any environmental regulations or laws were violated.

The U.S. Department of Justice has initiated a criminal investigation into the matter, according to a U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission filing on March 30 by ServiceMaster.

"The family is confident that the responsible parties will be brought to justice and held accountable," Maron said. (Additional reporting by Barbara Liston in Orlando; Writing by David Adams in Miami; Editing by Eric Walsh)

Family of 4 'Fighting for Everything Right Now' After Being Reportedly Poisoned at St. John Resort: Family Poisoned by Pesticides at St. John Resort Sirenusa

By Adam Carlson

04/05/2015 AT 09:50 AM EDT

People Magazine

A family of four was seriously injured at a Virgin Islands resort recently, leaving both teenage sons unconscious and the father at least temporarily immobile, after they were exposed to a banned and highly toxic pesticide, officials said this week.

Steve Esmond, Theresa Devine and their two teenage sons fell ill more than two weeks ago at the Sirenusa resort in St. John, at a luxury villa where rooms typically go for between \$550 and \$1,200 a night, according to CNN.

The family had been staying at the villa since March 14. When paramedics responded on March 20, they found Esmond unconscious and his wife and their sons suffering seizures. Devine has since been released from the hospital and is in occupational therapy, family attorney James Maron told CNN. He did not specify how paramedics were notified.

The sons remain unconscious, as of Saturday. Esmond is conscious, but cannot move or speak. All three are now in a Philadelphia hospital.

"The boys are in rough shape ... The family are all fighters," Maron told CNN. "They're fighting for everything right now. I understand it's a long recovery."

Preliminary testing shows the presence of methyl bromide, an acutely toxic and odorless pesticide banned in the U.S. except in limited agricultural settings, in the family's unit, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency told CNN.

The condominium beneath the family had been sprayed with the pesticide on March 18, a resort official told The News Journal in Wilmington, Delaware.

The methyl bromide was used to treat "indoor bugs," an EPA official told the News Journal. The EPA said its investigation is ongoing.

"Because methyl bromide dissipates so rapidly to the atmosphere, it is most dangerous at the actual fumigation site itself," the EPA explains on its website. "Human exposure to high concentrations of methyl bromide can result in central nervous system and respiratory system failure," among other side-effects.

Pesticide control was reportedly licensed out to Terminix, who in a Monday filing said it is now being investigated by the U.S. Department of Justice, according to CNN. That filing described the family's injuries as "serious."

"We're thinking about the family, and we join the community in wishing them a speedy recovery," a company spokesman told CNN.

The News Journal additionally reports that Virgin Islands regulators have issued a "stop-use order" against Terminix. They say the company used "Meth-O-Gas" indoors at the Sirenusa resort in October and again on March 18, two days before the family was hospitalized.

Family Poisoned on Vacation in Paradise: Beware toxic pesticides used at vacation spots

By Sandy Bauers

Posted: Sunday, April 5, 2015, 2:50 AM

Philadelphia Inquirer

It was a vacation nightmare. A Wilmington family of four staying in a Virgin Islands condo, with idyllic views of Cruz Bay on St. John, suddenly became seriously ill. So ill that they were airlifted home and hospitalized, the father and two teenage boys in critical condition.

The likely scenario that has emerged is that they were poisoned after methyl bromide was sprayed in the condo underneath the one where the family was staying. The pesticide is banned in many countries and is not authorized for use in residences in the U.S.

The incident, while deemed uncommon, has heightened concerns about travelers' exposure to pesticides in other regions or countries that may not have usage restrictions or regulatory oversight as stringent as that in the U.S.

"Can this go on as you travel around the world? It's easy to misuse a pesticide. It's easier in a country where there's a language difference and a lack of oversight or enforcement," said Jay Feldman, executive director of the national nonprofit advocacy group Beyond Pesticides, based in Washington.

"In many developing counties where there is a protracted man vs. insect battle, lots of misapplications take place," said Mark Robson, a professor in Rutgers University's School of Environmental and Plant Sciences. He also edits the Journal of Human and Ecological Risk Assessment. "One should be cautious, avoid the applications when possible, and assume they will occur in developing countries."

Paramedics in the Virgin Islands responded to a call March 20 at the Sirenusa Condominium Resort. The four people sickened were Stephen Esmond, an administrator at the private Tatnall School in Wilmington; his wife, Theresa Devine, a dentist; and their teenage sons Sean and Ryan, both students at Tatnall. The family's spokesman, Wilmington attorney James J. Maron, later said that the Esmonds were "in good hands medically" at undisclosed locations and that their conditions were improving.

Meanwhile, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, which has jurisdiction because St. John is a U.S. territory, continues to work with the Virgin Islands government and others to determine precisely what happened, a spokesman said. EPA regional administrator Judith Enck said in a prepared statement that her agency would "make sure steps are taken to prevent this from happening to others at these vacation apartments or elsewhere."

The family's symptoms have not been described. However, a fact sheet issued by the National Pesticide Information Center, a cooperative effort between Oregon State University and the EPA, indicates that methyl bromide is "highly toxic." Symptoms of exposure include headache, nausea, vomiting, visual disturbances, malaise, confusion, loss of coordination, slurred speech, and irritation of the skin, eyes, and respiratory system. Severe poisonings can result in paralysis, convulsions, coma, and death, according to the center. It said signs of poisoning might appear right away, or up to 48 hours after exposure.

Pesticide exposure is more commonly a concern for farm workers who apply them. "The life-threatening experience that this family experienced is an extreme version of what farm workers are exposed to routinely," said Jennifer Sass, senior scientist and toxicology expert at the Natural Resources Defense Council, a national nonprofit advocacy group.

The council has been advocating for a ban on the use of methyl bromide in the U.S., because of its extreme toxicity and because it depletes the protective ozone layer in the upper atmosphere. By continuing to allow even restricted uses in the U.S., Sass said, "you're also allowing people to buy it, sell it, and possess it."

The EPA has identified Terminix as the company that applied the chemical. "If a company as large as Terminix, which has trained workers presumably, are using pesticides in what appears to be unlawful ways . . . then how many other small companies are doing it that have less of a reputation?" she said. "I don't think we know."

Beyond Pesticides' Feldman said his office frequently received calls from vacationers to the Caribbean, Mexico, and other warm-climate areas who worry they might have been exposed to toxic pesticides. A typical scenario is a vacationer noticing a vehicle driving through the resort, emitting a noxious fog.

A news search brings up a smattering of results, not a public-health epidemic.

Nevertheless, in March, a Quebec coroner concluded that two sisters who were found dead in 2012 in their hotel room in Thailand most likely were poisoned by phosphine, a chemical used to exterminate bedbugs, according to a report in the Montreal Gazette.

Another bedbug pesticide, pyrophos, has been implicated in the deaths of a California woman and six other tourists in a different hotel in Thailand, according to a 2011 report in Britain's Daily Mail.

The crowd-sourced travel booking and review site TripAdvisor.com has numerous comments from vacationers who noticed a fog of what was presumably an insecticide at their resort.

"The grounds staff drive a golf cart around the resort roughly twice per day spewing a pesticide fog from a machine on the back," said one woman of a resort in the Turks and Caicos.

Robson said he has been sprayed as he sat by the pool at a resort in Africa, in airplanes, and even one time in a sauna in Poland. "Many places have unqualified people making these applications, typically in long white coats and wearing gloves and goggles, while you sit there by the pool in only a bathing suit."

The continuing spread of insect-borne diseases such as chickungunya, and nuisance pests such as bedbugs, may be exacerbating the problem, Feldman said. "Especially when there are insects that carry diseases that represent a public-health problem, there's a tendency to turn to more highly toxic chemicals and to use them more broadly."

He suspects that many vacationers are exposed to low doses of pesticides, but never realize it. The headache, nausea, and dizziness attributed to overindulgences may actually be a reaction to a chemical.

Feldman advises those with concerns to check with the hotel or resort management ahead of time to ask what chemicals are used. He also suggests that when travelers arrive, they open the doors and windows to their rooms to air them out.

Pesticide's use probed in Delaware family's illnesses after Virgin Islands vacation

BY Tobias Salinger

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

Sunday, April 5, 2015, 4:30 AM

Photo: Steve Esmond has regained consciousness but his sons have not, according to reports.

U.S. authorities are investigating whether a pesticide made a Delaware family ill while they were on vacation in the Virgin Islands.

Steve Esmond, 49, and his two sons remain in critical condition after the family of four fell ill March 20 in Cruz Bay, St. John, and had to be airlifted back to the U.S. mainland, The News Journal in Wilmington reported.

Esmond's wife, Dr. Theresa Devine, 49, has been released from the hospital. Esmond, an official at the private Tatnall School in Greenville, Del., has regained consciousness, according to the newspaper. But their high school-age sons, Ryan and Sean, remain unresponsive, the paper reported.

Officials at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency announced Friday that investigators found a toxic pesticide not permitted for residential use, a substance known as methyl bromide, during its preliminary examination of the rental villa where the family stayed at the luxury Sirenusa resort, according to CNN.

The agency said March 26 that it would probe a potential link between the pesticide and the family's plight. Methyl bromide, which the EPA says can cause central nervous or respiratory damage, may have caused the family's sickness, EPA regional administrator Judith A. Enck told CNN.

Esmond is head of the middle school at the private Tatnall School, pictured, in Delaware.WPVI-TV

Esmond is head of the middle school at the private Tatnall School, pictured, in Delaware.

"Pesticides can be very toxic, and it is critically important that they be applied properly and used only as approved by the EPA," Enck said. "The EPA is actively working to determine how this happened and will make sure steps are taken to prevent this from happening to others at these vacation apartments or elsewhere."

According to an announcement from the agency, a team of exterminators may have used the colorless, odorless gas while fumigating a room at the resort March 18.

The U.S. Department of Justice has opened a criminal investigation into whether a local Terminix branch used the toxin, says a March 30 U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission filing by Terminix parent ServiceMaster Global Holdings. The EPA and the U.S. Virgin Islands Department of Planning & Natural Resources are also taking part in the inquiry, according to the filing.

"We're thinking about the family, and we join the community in wishing them a speedy recovery," Terminix said in a statement to CNN, noting the company was conducting an internal investigation in addition to cooperating with the government's investigation.

Pesticide's use investigated in Del. family's illness: EPA

<https://fnews.com/pesticides-use-investigated-in-del-familys-illness-epa-k1j8>

Authorities are investigating no matter whether a pesticide triggered the harrowing illnesses that gripped a Delaware family on holiday in the U.S. Virgin Islands. Steve Esmond, 49, and his two sons remain in essential situation after the household of 4 fell...

Authorities are investigating no matter whether a pesticide triggered the harrowing illnesses that gripped a Delaware family on holiday in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Steve Esmond, 49, and his two sons remain in essential situation after the household of 4 fell ill on March 20 in Cruz Bay, St. John and had to be airlifted back to the U.S. mainland, The News Journal of Wilmington, Del. reported.

Esmond's wife, Dr. Theresa Devine, 49, has been released from the hospital and Esmond, the middle college head of the Tatnall College in Greenville, Del., has regained consciousness, according to the publication. But the couple's higher-college age sons, Ryan and Sean, continue to be unresponsive, the newspaper reported.

Meanwhile, officials at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency announced Friday that investigators discovered a toxic pesticide not permitted for residential use, a substance identified as methyl bromide, during its preliminary examination of the rental villa exactly where the family stayed at the luxury Sirenusa resort, according to CNN.

The agency had disclosed on March 26 that it would probe a potential hyperlink in between the pesticide and the family's plight. Methyl bromide, which the EPA says can bring about central nervous or respiratory harm, may perhaps nicely have triggered the family's ill health, EPA regional administrator Judith A. Enck told CNN.

Currently, our Middle College students produced get properly cards for Middle College Head Steve Esmond and his loved ones. The whole...

"Pesticides can be pretty toxic, and it is critically critical that they be applied correctly and made use of only as approved by EPA," Enck mentioned. "The EPA is actively functioning to ascertain how this occurred and will make positive steps are taken to protect against this from happening to other folks at these getaway apartments or elsewhere."

Investigators think a group of exterminators might have employed the colorless and odorless gas while fumigating a area at the villa rental resort on March 18, according to an announcement from the agency.

The Division of Justice has opened a criminal investigation into irrespective of whether a neighborhood Terminix branch employed the toxin, a March 30 Securities and Exchange Commission filing by Terminix parent ServiceMaster Worldwide Holdings says. The EPA and the U.S. Virgin Islands Division of Planning & Organic Resources are also participating in the inquiry, according to the filing.

"We're considering about the loved ones, and we join the community in wishing them a speedy recovery," Terminix said in a statement to CNN, noting the business is conducting an internal investigation in addition to cooperating with the government's investigation. Business officials are "committed to performing all function ... in a manner that is safe for our buyers, personnel, the public and the atmosphere."

Delaware Family Falls Ill After Exposure to Pesticide During Vacation to Caribbean

Posted yesterday at 4:05pm

KVNU Radio

Creatas/Thinkstock(NEW YORK) -- Four members of a Delaware family fell ill and three remain in critical condition on Sunday after they were apparently exposed to pesticide during a vacation

last month.

A Delaware family rented a property from March 14 to March 22. On the day they arrived on the island of St. John, the condo below the one they were staying in was apparently sprayed with methyl bromide in order to deal with an indoor bug.

Methyl bromide was banned for indoor residential use in 1984 by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, but is still on the market for agricultural use.

Judith Enck, Administrator for EPA's New York office, said that the pesticide had been sprayed by Terminix workers.

By evening on the day the family checked in, all four began to have adverse reactions. Enck said that two teen boys suffered seizures and were brought to a hospital on the neighboring island of St. Thomas. Both boys and their father were placed on ventilators. The boys were later airlifted to a children's hospital in Philadelphia, while their parents were taken to a hospital in Delaware. The boys and their father remain in critical condition.

The EPA has launched a "comprehensive investigation," Enck said. "We're looking at what happened here, which we consider an illegal application of methyl bromide." The agency wants to find out whether the pesticide was used at other locations, and has already issued a pesticide warning in the Caribbean.

Sea Glass Vacations, the rental agency for the property, said that it was aware of the incident and would fully cooperate with investigating authorities. As far as the chemical spraying, however, Sea Glass directed questions to Terminix.

"First and foremost, the family is in our thoughts and prayers," read a statement from Terminix spokesperson Pete Tosches. "We're cooperating with authorities in their investigation, and we're conducting our own thorough investigation in the matter."

Tosches told ABC News that the company had halted all fumigation work in the Virgin Islands.

The U.S. Department of Justice has also launched an investigation into Terminix's use of methyl bromide.

Criminal probe launched in family poisoning case

By ALDETH LEWIN (Daily News Staff)

Published: April 3, 2015

Virgin Islands News

The Environmental Protection Agency has confirmed that the chemical that poisoned a vacationing family on St. John last month was methyl bromide, and the U.S. Justice Department launched a criminal investigation into the incident, according to documents filed with the Securities and Exchange Commission.

"We haven't completed the quality assurance, but the preliminary results did confirm the presence of methyl bromide," EPA spokesman Elias Rodriguez said Thursday.

Methyl bromide is a gas used as a fumigated pesticide. However, its use is highly restricted because of its toxicity, and it is not supposed to be used in residential environments.

On March 20, a Delaware family was admitted to Schneider Hospital with symptoms of

EPA: Pesticide may have caused illness in family staying at Virgin Islands resort

Methyl bromide exposure could have been what caused Steve Esmond's inability to talk or move and his sons to fall into a coma, the EPA says.

EPA: Pesticide may have caused illness in family staying at Virgin Islands resort: Methyl bromide exposure could have been what caused Steve Esmond's inability to talk or move and his sons to fall into a coma, the EPA says.

By Fred Lambert Contact the Author

April 4, 2015 at 10:27 PM

UPI.com

Phoro: A ship cruising into St. John, U.S. Virgin Islands, where in March 2015 a Delaware family vacationing at a resort fell ill from possible exposure to a toxic pesticide. The EPA is investigating whether any laws or regulations were broken.

ST. JOHN, Virgin Islands, April 4 (UPI) -- The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency on Friday said exposure to a pesticide with restricted use in the United States may have caused severe illness in a Delaware family vacationing at a Virgin Islands resort.

Steve Esmond, his wife and two teenage sons had been renting a villa at the Sirenusa resort on St. John in the U.S. Virgin Islands since March 14. The EPA received reports of the family falling ill on March 20; paramedics had found Esmond unconscious and his wife and sons, 14 and 16, having seizures.

According to family attorney James Maron, Esmond is still unable to move or talk, and his two sons are in critical condition after being airlifted to the United States, where on Saturday they remained in a coma at a Philadelphia hospital. Esmond's wife, Theresa Devine, was released after treatment but remains in occupational therapy.

Speaking Friday, EPA spokesman Elias Rodriguez said preliminary tests did "show that there was a presence of methyl bromide in the unit where the family was staying."

The EPA defines methyl bromide as a "broad spectrum pesticide" designed to control "pest insects, nematodes, weeds, pathogens, and rodents," but that it "will affect not only the target pests it is used against, but non-target organisms as well."

"Human exposure to high concentrations of methyl bromide can result in central nervous system and respiratory system failure, as well as specific and severe deleterious actions on the lungs, eyes, and skin," according to the agency.

Because of its toxicity, methyl bromide is only permitted for outdoor use by certified professionals in the United States.

Sirenusa resort was reportedly fumigated on March 18, and the EPA is working with local investigators to discern whether any laws or regulations were breached.

Sea Glass Vacations, the rental agency for several villas at Sirenusa resort, said it uses an outside pest control company called Terminix.

"We're thinking about the family, and we join the community in wishing them a speedy recovery," Terminix wrote in an email statement to CNN, noting also that it is "looking into this matter internally, and cooperating with authorities."

Final results in the EPA investigation are expected next week.

UK Daily Mail

US family fighting for life after they were 'poisoned' and found having seizures at luxury Caribbean resort: Two sons in a coma and their father paralyzed by 'pesticide' at \$875-a-night getaway

By Anneta Konstantinides

For Dailymail.com

4 April 2015

Two Delaware boys are in a coma and their father remains unable to move or talk two weeks after the family became sick from possible pesticide exposure during a vacation on the US Virgin Islands, officials say.

Steve Esmond and his wife, Dr Theresa Devine, and their two teenage sons fell seriously ill during their stay at the Sirenusa Condominium Resort on the island of St. John.

The family were airlifted to separate hospitals in Philadelphia suffering major respiratory trauma. Sean, 16, and Ryan, 14, were in critical condition.

- Steve Esmond, his wife Theresa Divine and their two teenage sons fell seriously ill while staying at the Sirenusa Resort in St. John
- Divine was released from hospital and is now in occupational therapy

- The family's lawyer said the boys are in 'rough shape'
- On Friday the US Environmental Protection Agency said preliminary tests showed there was 'a presence of methyl bromide in the unit'

Steve Esmond and his wife, Dr Theresa Devine, and their two teenage sons fell seriously ill during their stay at the Sirenusa Condominium Resort on the island of St. John

James Maron, the family's lawyer, said the boys were in 'rough shape'.

'The family are all fighters,' he told WPBF News. 'They're fighting for everything right now. I understand it's a long recovery.'

Maron said Esmond, who is an administrator of the private Tatnall School in Wilmington, is conscious but unable to move.

Devine, a dentist, was treated and released from the hospital and is currently in occupational therapy.

The Tatnall school, where Sean was a star lacrosse player, posted on their Facebook page that they had the Middle School students write get well cards for Esmond and his family.

'The entire Tatnall community continues to direct its supportive energy toward the Esmonds and asks that everyone keep the family in their thoughts and prayers during this difficult time.'

Tuition at the Tatnall school can range from \$20,000 to \$25,000 a year.

Sean, 16, (pictured) and his 14-year-old brother Ryan remain in comas two weeks after being hospitalized

On Friday a spokesman from the US Environmental Protection agency said that the family may have fallen ill because of the presence of a pesticide at the rented villa.

Elias Rodriguez said preliminary tests showed there was 'a presence of methyl bromide in the unit where the family was staying'.

Methyl Bromide, which is odorless, can be fatal or cause serious damage to the central nervous system and respiratory system, according to the EPA.

It is acutely toxic, and only permitted to be used outdoors by certified professionals in the US.

Rodriguez said the investigation is 'ongoing' and the agency is still on the island for testing.

The family was staying at the \$875-a-night Sirenusa Condominium Resort on St. John in the US Virgin Islands

'We have been doing different types of air sampling and wipe sampling,' he said.

Sea Glass Vacations, which acts as a rental agent for several units at Sirenusa Condominium

Resort, said the unit where the family was staying was not treated with a pesticide, but rather the unit immediately below their suite.

Maron said when paramedics arrived at the villa Esmond was found unconscious.

His sons and wife were having seizures.

The US Department of Justice has initiated a criminal investigation into the matter

On Friday the US Environmental Protection agency said preliminary tests showed there was 'a presence of methyl bromide in the unit where the family was staying'

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